

Crosstown funding share urged

House transportation bill contains \$13.3 million for massive project

By Chris Casteel Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — U.S. Rep. Ernest Istook repeated his call Tuesday for the Oklahoma Department of Transportation to contribute money to the I-40 Crosstown Expressway after the House passed a transportation bill that includes nearly \$13.3 million for the huge project.

The transportation spending bill, produced by the subcommittee that Istook chairs, includes a \$38.5 million increase in federal funds that can be used at the state's discretion.

The increase would boost the state's overall federal share to \$510 million next year, counting \$62.7 million in designated projects, which includes the Crosstown Expressway.

Istook, R-Warr Acres, said the funding level for the next fiscal year ensures state motorists won't be spending more on federal fuel taxes than the state receives for transportation projects.

Oklahoma traditionally has been a "donor state," sending more money to Washington than it gets for roads and bridges.

Istook's influence on the transportation appropriations process meant a huge boost in support for the Crosstown Expressway, planned for a section of Interstate 40 near downtown Oklahoma City.

However, even the \$13.26 million earmarked for next year leaves the project well short of the estimated \$350 million price tag. The state has received more than \$114 million so far, but most came in 1998, when Congress was flush with highway money.

Istook said Tuesday the Crosstown "will be the most expensive in state history. I hope that state officials will use part of this extra \$38 million to demonstrate local commitment to the Crosstown Expressway. If we all work together, we can get the necessary dollars to complete this crucial project."

State highway officials have been reluctant to use state money on the project or federal money not specifically earmarked for the Crosstown.

Istook met with state and city officials about the situation last month, urging them to confront the possibility that the state's congressional delegation might not be able to get the entire amount.

State Transportation Director Gary Ridley told The Oklahoman a few days after the meeting that other transportation needs outstrip the state's ability to pay for the Crosstown with its regular allocation of federal funds.

The transportation spending bill that passed Tuesday also includes money for numerous

projects around the state. In Oklahoma City, \$250,000 is available to repair NE 23 between Lincoln and Interstate 35 in Oklahoma City and \$300,000 is earmarked for improvements on Lake Stanley Draper Road. The Central Oklahoma Transportation and Parking Authority also has \$1,820,000.

The \$89.6 billion spending bill covers transportation and the U.S. Treasury Department. It was the first to pass the House under Istook's direction.